

# Puerto Rico missionary's relief ministry opens hearts

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COMERÍO, Puerto Rico (BP)—Even in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, Southern Baptist missionary Jorge Santiago has experienced the truth of Romans 8:28—that God can work all things together for good.

## ‘We just focused on helping people’

In July, Jorge and Rebeca Santiago moved to Puerto Rico with their two children, Sebastian and Sophia, to serve as [North American Mission Board](#) church planting missionaries in Comerío, a municipality of 20,000 about 30 miles south of San Juan.

“Right after the storm, we just focused on helping people,” Santiago said. “We started looking for resources, food and water so that we could take it to Comerío.”

Baptist pastors on the island rallied together, along with some from other denominations, to help one another in their mission to serve those in need. As Santiago prayed and ventured to find food and other resources, he noticed, both from personal experience and from others' stories, just how difficult it was to wash clothes by hand.

## Laundry as ministry

Santiago saw groups distributing food and water, but no one was helping people clean their clothes.

“My wife's dad is a pastor whose church sent us some money,” Santiago

noted, most of which he and his family used to buy three washing machines “by faith.”

They eventually were able to acquire three more washing machines they have used to start a community outreach called *Proyecto Mi Ropa Limpia*—My Clean Clothes Project.

“God hasn’t stopped giving to us,” Santiago said. “And we haven’t stopped giving to the people everything that comes our way.”

The Santiagos have been hard at work ministering in Comerío, leaving for the town around 4:30 each morning and not returning to their base in San Lorenzo, 30 miles to the east, until 8:30 or 9:00 at night. Rebeca manages the washing machines, while Jorge travels around searching for food and water, distributing what he is able to find.

## **Resources received at the right time**

Santiago received one of the pastor packs that NAMB’s [Send Relief](#) ministry sent to Puerto Rico. The package arrived at a time when he was having difficulty finding resources, he noted.

Whenever he went to search, Santiago would pray and ask God to lead him to where the resources could be found. After three days of not finding anything, he received a phone call telling him to go to the Send Relief warehouse.

“Then, when I saw the pastor package, I started crying, because I saw all the things they brought to us,” Santiago recounted.

The generator included in the package is being used to power some of the washing machines for My Clean Clothes Project, and the other food and resources have been a boost for Santiago’s ministry to the community.

## **‘Live the gospel by serving the people’**

“God gave us the privilege to show the people how committed we are to them and to God,” Santiago said. “We get to live the gospel by serving the people.”

Initially, Santiago and his family planned to start church services in January. Hurricane Maria changed those plans, however, and Sunday, Nov. 12, Santiago preached the gospel and prayed with a group of people as they gathered to share a hot meal.

“It is good, all that we are doing right now to help serve people,” he said. “It’s important to the people, but more important than that is the need to share the gospel.”

## **Open to hearing the message of salvation**

Santiago recognized it was time to start preaching. The community was open.

“People every day started asking me what my church is, but I don’t even have a church yet,” he said. “They kept asking me the time of the service, and they wanted to hear the word of God.”

The Santiagos plan to continue gathering with people every Sunday and preaching the gospel. The way his family served the community opened the door for the gospel and has made Santiago eager to preach the Good News.

# **‘Prove to them that you love them’**

“We are not here to play or waste our time or God’s time.” Santiago said.  
“We are here with a mission, and we are here to accomplish our mission.”

Santiago continues to move toward an official launch for the church, but in the meantime, he and other ministers will make use of resources that arrive.

“As a pastor, I still need resources to help the people,” Santiago said.  
“People won’t believe in what you’re going to say to them unless you prove to them that you love them. The way that they experience your love for them is by giving to them.”